

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA

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AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 702

ABIDJAN ALSO FOR USDAO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINR, PGOV, DM

SUBJ: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTORAL PROCEDURES

1. A NEW ELECTORAL PLAN FOR THE PROPOSED NATIONAL REVOLUTION-ARY ASSEMBLY TO BE ESTABLISHED UNDER BENIN'S NEW CONSTITUTION WAS ANNOUNCED APRIL 29. CHIEF AMONG ITS PROVISIONS IS THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO ELECT THE "COMMISSAIRES DU PEUPLE- (ASSEMBLY DELEGATES) BY CLASS AND TRADE RATHER THAN BY REGION.

2. IN THE DIVISION OF ELECTORAL POWER, THE DOMINANCE IS TO BE GIVEN TO THE "RURAL MASSES", A POSITION WHICH WAS EMPHASIZED BY PRESIDENT KEREKOU IN A MAY DAY SPEECH EXALTING THE PEASANTRY AND CASTIGATING THE "SLOVENLY" CITY DWELLERS FOR THEIR "BOURGEOIS, CONSUMER HABITS." ONE-FOURTH OF THE SEATS IN THE
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ASSEMBLY HAVE BEEN RESERVED FOR RURAL DELEGATES. THE REST HAVE BEEN GIVEN EITHER TO OTHER SOCIO-ECONOMIC CATEGORIES OR TO IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS LABOR UNIONS. PREDICTABLY, STRONG REPRESENTATION WAS ACCORDED TO "THE WORKERS," THE PARTY, AND TEACHERS, WHILE THE "BOURGEOISIE LOCALE," AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS RECEIVED ONLY TOKEN REPRESENTATION.

3. NO DATE HAS YET BEEN SET FOR ELECTIONS, AND NONE IS EXPECTED IN THE NEAR FUTURE. NEVERTHELESS, PRESIDENT KEREKOU SEEMS TO BE GENUINELY DETERMINED TO PROCEED WITH THE NEW ELECTORAL LAW, AND HAS MADE SOME EFFORT TO PUBLICIZE IT THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. STILL TO BE ANSWERED, HOWEVER, ARE TWO MAIN QUESTIONS: WHO WILL HAVE THE POWER TO NOMINATE CANDIDATES FOR THE ASSEMBLY, AND HOW MUCH POWER WILL BE ENTRUSTED TO THE ASSEMBLY ONCE ELECTED? AT THIS STAGE, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE POWER OF NOMINATION WILL BE RESERVED TO THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PARTI DE LA REVOLUTION POPULAIRE DU BENIN.

4. IT WILL ALSO BE NECESSARY TO OVERCOME OPPOSITION BY CABINET MINISTERS, ESPECIALLY KEREKOU'S DEPUTY, LT. COL. OHOUENS, TO CIVILIAN RULE. OHOUENS, LIKE OTHER MINISTERS, USES HIS POSITION TO FURTHER HIS OWN FINANCIAL INTERESTS. UNLIKE OTHER MINISTERS WHO LACK A POWER BASE, OHOUENS COMMANDS THE LOYALTY OF THE GENDARMES, WHO ARE ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS NUMEROUS THAN THE ARMY. OHOUENS HAS REPORTEDLY SAID HE WILL STEP DOWN WHEN KEREKOU DOES -- A PROPOSITION UNPALATABLE TO THE "GRANDE COMRADE DE LUTTE" WHOSE DEFINITION OF CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT STOPS ONE STEP SHORT OF THE PRESIDENCY.

5. THUS THE ANNOUNCEMENT MAY BE ONE MORE TACTIC IN A POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN MARXIST IDEOLOGUES AND OLD GUARD SOLDIERS WITHIN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. WHILE KNOWLEDGEABLE OBS-
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EVERS DO NOT EXPECT THIS POWER STRUGGLE TO DEGENERATE INTO A CLASH BETWEEN GENDARMES AND THE ARMY, THEY DO FORESEE ANOTHER PERIOD OF INTRA-CABINET MANEUVERING WHICH WILL FURTHER SLOW THE FUNCTIONING OF AN ALREADY UNWEILDY GOVERNMENT. THOMPSON

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